

Sustaining Time:

**exploring the emergent times of alternative
economies**

Archives Research Report

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An AHRC Care for the Future Exploratory Project



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The Working Class Movement Library by Andrew Nić-Pawełek (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Project Overview

Sustaining Time: Exploring the emergent times of alternative economies ran from February 2013 to October 2013 and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of their *Care for the Future* Exploratory Awards. Its central aim was to ask whether shifts towards more sustainable economies might also bring with them shifts in experiences of time. Broadly speaking, if industrial capitalism was linked with clock time, and late capitalism with a speeded up, 24/7 networked time, what would be the time of a sustainable economy?

In a context where any hope of a speedy recovery from the 2008 economic crisis is increasingly untenable, there has been an explosion of interest around alternatives to the dominant capitalist model. Focusing on the potential of collaborative relationships, rather than ones based on competition, proponents of the new economics are exploring gift economies, peer-to-peer paradigms, shared consumption, crowd-funding and cooperative models. Already, there are hints that this work does bring with it broad shifts in senses of time. The move from narratives of unending growth towards more sustainable visions of steady-state futures is a good example. While looking more closely at movements such as Slow Food, Permaculture or Transition Towns, shows an effort to reconfigure daily life around slower tempos and non-linear models of social change.

Given that the idea of time can often seem obscure, a core aim of this project was to initiate conversations about the role of time in sustainable economies with a wide range of individuals and organisations with a view to developing a larger research project that could meet a range of identified needs. In order to do this we have produced a range of materials, of which this report is a part. It provides an initial overview of results from research conducted at four archive collections completed as part of the project, as well as some interim conclusion

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1. Introduction

This is a preliminary report on the archival research undertaken as part of the AHRC-funded Sustaining time project. The aim of the archival research was to explore the potential of archival research as temporal method and whether archives might be a resource for researching experiences of time within non-capitalist or anti-capitalist systems, organizations or communities.

2. Methodology

As a preliminary stage of research, 4 repositories were identified which were felt to have potential for the proposed research. Criteria used for selection were as follows:

- Range of material held (the repository should hold material from a variety of different sources)
- Extent of material held (the repository should hold sufficient material to ensure that there would be adequate resources for the length of the field trip)
- Provenance of material (the materials should derive from organisations, individuals or communities identified as non-capitalist or anti-capitalist)
- Accessibility of material (the repository should be open to the public, its materials should be adequately catalogued and there should be no restriction on the amount of material which can be ordered in one day).

There were more than 4 repositories identified which met these criteria, including The National Archives; The Bishopsgate Institute; The London School of Economics; The People's Museum; Lambeth Palace Library, and a number of local record offices or university special collections holding archives of individual protest groups and/or communes. Each of these would merit further investigation. However, the repositories selected were the Co-operative Archives; the Working Class Movement Library; the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University and the Guildhall Library.

A number of documents were selected via the catalogue and the advice of the archivist, which were then appraised for their research value for this project and notes/photographs taken of relevant materials.

The analysis stage is so far only provisional - this report represents an identification of possible themes which could be further explored, both within the materials already earmarked and through further research. The themes have been identified through an iterative process - through use of relevant literature (which does not form part of the present report) and through analysis of the records themselves.

3. Resources Used

- 3.1. **The National Co-operative Archive** was founded in 2000, the result of an amalgamation of resources held by the Co-operative Union (founded in 1869 as the national federation of co-operative societies, with an additional remit to foster co-operation and educate co-operators) and the Co-operative College, originally part of the Union but which became a separate entity when space ran out on the original site. Both the Union and the College collected library and archive materials to support their educational function; these collections included the Robert Owen correspondence, collected by George Jacob Holyoake, Holyoake's own correspondence, correspondence and papers of other major figures in the co-operative movement and the records of national co-operative bodies. In general, records of local co-operative bodies have been deposited locally, in country record offices, but as the Co-operative College was based near Loughborough, it collected records for co-operatives in the Midland District. The archive is now part of the Co-operative Heritage Trust. Its collections have designated status and most have been catalogued and indexed, many to item level, with the aid of Heritage Lottery funding.
- 3.2. **The Working Class Movement Library** started as the personal collection of Edmund and Ruth Frow. Both were members of the Communist Party and met in 1953 at a Communist Party day school on labour history. They began to collect materials relevant to the study of working class history which they made freely available to interested researchers. By the late 1960s their house became known as the Working Class Movement Library. It became a Charitable Trust in 1971 and moved to its present location in 1987, where Ruth Frow continued to work as curator and promoter of the collections. In 2008, just before her death, the collections were awarded Heritage Lottery Funding for their further cataloguing and preservation. Not all the holdings have been fully described but the catalogues are very detailed, including indexing to item level.
- 3.3. **The Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick** was established in 1973 as a resource for historians working on modern British social, political and economic history - historian E.P. Thompson was then working at the University and established the Centre for Social History. The MRC has a special focus on the national history of industrial relations, industrial politics and labour history, with archives of businesses (such as BP) and, in particular, archives of unions, including the TUC archive. It also has an interest in radical British political movements and activist groups, such as the CND and associated individuals. It is a designated collection and the materials are well catalogued.
- 3.4. **The Guildhall Library** is managed by the Corporation of London. It originally held all the manuscript and archive material relating to the City of London, however following restructuring, the majority of this material has now been moved to the London

Metropolitan Archives. The Livery Company records are not owned by the Corporation and by agreement with the Livery Companies have not been moved. There is a published catalogue which is in the process of being updated; however it can be difficult to use and the electronic catalogue is also problematic. There are no archivists on the staff at the Guildhall Library.

4. Themes Identified

4.1 Feelings of time

- 4.1.1. Division of time into 'work time' and 'home time' was fundamental even to many who sought to improve working conditions. No evidence for this division within Guild records, but little opportunity for its expression within the sources used. Some co-operative businesses sought to break down this division by providing out of work activities for workers (along the model of 'enlightened employers' such as Lord Lever). Some evidence in 1970s for advocacy of improving links between workers in areas dominated by a single industry and the community - industry should understand community needs and aspirations 'if the future of the industry is to be at all purposeful'.
- 4.1.2. Division of work time into times of productivity and breaks. Important of tea breaks ('nammit time' in Dorset dialect).
- 4.1.3. Advocacy of/policing of societally-sanctioned 'non-work' time - campaigns for not selling meat on Sundays; Shop Hours League; campaigns for increase in public holidays. Suppression of sale of meat on Sundays said to have resulted in man buying his family's Sunday meal on Saturday night rather than spending the week's earnings on drink and buying the meat at a cheaper rate rather than the elevated Sunday prices.
- 4.1.4. Evidence that methods adopted for activism/opposition, especially those designed to achieve representation, were perceived as over lengthy and 'time-wasting' - although the numbers of people prepared to participate suggests wide-scale acceptance of their necessity. Livery companies imposed fines on those who did not attend meetings when summoned or who refused to hold office.
- 4.1.5. Views that participation in the representative structures of trades unionism or co-operation should not occur in 'home time'.
- 4.1.6. Task or piece work viewed by its supporters as putting the worker in control of the pace of work, provided it was adequately rewarded.
- 4.1.7. Time management seen to encourage a 'mad speed-up', induced by sense of surveillance as well as the incentives involved.
- 4.1.8. Seasonality of work - particularly within craft-based organisations. This was viewed as sanctioned by tradition and moves were made to retain traditional rhythms (e.g. for Pewterers, winter was viewed positively as a time of 'vacation').

From the opposite angle, seasonality also common in the car industry before the 2WW (pre-Unionisation - seen negatively by some as an opportunity by managers to fire Unionists).

- 4.1.9. Sense of crisis and 'living on "borrowed time"' in the 1970s car industry - division between 'after-effects' of 1974-5 crisis and 'long-term' changes. Uncertainty led to demoralization and worker defection.
- 4.1.10. Strikes more often measured in terms of days or weeks off work, more than numbers on strike.

4.2. Past and future

- 4.2.1. Activist propaganda underpinned by explicit belief in a potentially better future, to be achieved by efforts in the present.
- 4.2.2. Marxist reading of history demonstrates the inevitability of a future Communist revolution, fundamental to Marxist activism and its archives.
- 4.2.3. Worker struggle represented as one of progress, with history often referenced in teleological terms by reference to specific instances of 'progress', such as Factory Acts. Desire to use historical research to reinforce arguments in favour of reduction in working hours.
- 4.2.4. Whilst happy to memorialize 'heroes' - and using the promise of future historical status as an incentive to action, little evidence that working class organizations viewed the past with nostalgia. Instead we find evidence for campaigns for the retention of the status quo, in order that the future should not be worse, backed up by arguments derived from historical precedent, in particular in craft-based organizations or those in which practices had become well-established. Threat of 'something worse' also used by management to bring in innovations.
- 4.2.5. Mechanization and industrialization presented by their proponents as progressive - 'the future', thus relegating other methods of production to an outdated past.
- 4.2.6. 'Invented pasts' to reinforce community identity.
- 4.2.7. 'Invented pasts' as a model for future social and economic systems - e.g. Guilds and the guild system. Research found little evidence of harmony between masters and workers or shared temporality, despite their membership of the same guild, but it is admitted that the records interrogated for this purpose dated from a period when the guild system no longer provided adequate protection for members, which may have intensified internal tensions. Evidence that the Livery of Companies acted against members of the Yeomanry who formed combinations (trades unions).

4.3. Critical temporalities

- 4.3.1. Reduction in the working day for reasons of worker welfare - however reform could be directed towards perceived abuses in the system, without attacking - or even whilst reinforcing - some of the system's premises, such as the division

between 'home' and 'work' times.

- 4.3.2. Reduction in working hours to improve employment. As Tom Mann put it: 'EVERY INDUSTRY SHOULD CARRY ITS FULL COMPLEMENT OF WORKERS, AND CARRY THEM CONSTANTLY.'

If not enough work for all, working hours should be adjusted - working hours should be adjusted until there is no unemployment.'

- 4.3.3. Evidence for workers' concerns about the campaign for reduced working hours: fears that reduction in the working week might lead to reduced pay (although TUC campaign was for reduced working hours with no loss of pay). TUC collected evidence from businesses suggesting that this was possible - however apparently no recognition that several of the firms involved also used time management practices and productivity incentives. Reconfiguration of the working week

- 4.3.4. One of the most interesting critical temporalities uncovered by the research was the 'Rainbow Calendar' devised by an as yet unidentified Lawson, which suggested the abandonment of the standard 7 day week in order for businesses to operate at full capacity without shut-down time.

- 4.3.5. Time banking - one possible model described and trialled by Robert Owen - however seems only to have been suitable for those individually responsible for luxury consumer goods - did not work for industrial or collaborative production methods.

- 4.3.6. Suggestions for alternative production models in order to achieve long-term sustainability - evident in discussion of the future of the UK car industry. These included production of community vehicles (collaboratively designed), vehicles for those with disabilities, vehicles for the 'Third World', low cost leisure vehicles, vehicles for short-distance travel (moped style), customised vehicles, hybrid vehicles and increased use of recycling, both for new products and from used cars (based on recognition of the 'notoriously rapid depreciation of the "car"').

4.4. Time/money/value

- 4.4.1. The archives revealed the diversity of payment methods - rather than a simple replacement of task-based labour by wage-labour - and that each had both its supporting arguments, from both capitalistic and oppositional standpoints.

Task based systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Norm for artisan production and clothing industry• Prices traditionally fixed by custom/negotiation/inquiry and published to be common throughout the industry (numerous piece work price books in the archives)• Speed and pattern of work depended on choice by worker/s (and quality control by supervisor)• Worker could build up reserves to cover periods when s/he might be less able to work (e.g. saving docketts)• Could be linked to high earnings (as in steel industry in 1920)
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered opportunity for regular negotiation
Wage systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective bargaining for wages and working hours easier; encouraged cooperation between workers • Required clocking in and out
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overtime • In regular use in many industries • Popular with workers seeking to maximise income without concern for out-of-work responsibilities • Opposed by unions during the period researched as perceived to increase unemployment • Used by employers to increase production without changing basic working hours or increasing number of employees • Time management systems (e.g. Bedaux, Rowan, Measured Day Work) • Introduced in 1920s • Opposed by unions • Associated with 'speeding up' of production, ostensibly by improving worker practices but perceived by workers as an attack on worker autonomy - argued that speeding up was due to surveillance rather than improved efficiency and led to stress/exhaustion • Poor management of systems could lead to low productivity - workers leaving early having achieved quota/workers unable to achieve quota through logistics problems • Speed of work determined by 'experts' in the pay of management • Required increased numbers of 'managers' • Suggestion by workers that managers more interested in control aspects than increasing production - power over productivity • Complexity of some of the systems, esp. Bedaux, seen as deliberately impeding worker understanding and therefore limiting potential opposition • Worker participation schemes • Used in 1970s car industry • Introduced by management • Generally introduced in plants already in crisis as a response to crisis, rather than in successful plants as a means of improvement

- 4.4.2 Opposition to mechanisation was often expressed in temporal terms, by reference to time-honoured practices; also recognition that technology could bring time 'savings': 'Robots don't take tea-breaks', emphasizing the importance of regular pace for industrial production over the value of human ingenuity and innovation. However also recognition that as machinery became more complex, it became outdated more quickly, requiring increased capital investment. Could be cheaper to pursue other means of increasing productivity (time management).
- 4.4.3 'Flexibility' is found in texts from the 1960s and 1970s, often in association with working time patterns ('flexitime'). Flexitime generally popular with workers; being moved to different production areas in line with need less so - opposition often expressed in temporal terms as it forced workers to work 'bell to bell'.
- 4.4.4 One of the significant oppositions to time management methods which focused on worker productivity was the observation that one of the most significant causes of inefficiency in production was the existence of 'waiting time' due to poor communication by management: 'Only by making waiting time an expensive luxury can we attain the Industrial [sic] efficiency enjoyed in some other countries.' This was not a new problem, however - a 1579 Indenture between the Bricklayers and the Masons of London included provisions for dealing with situations in which one or other trade, working on the same building, had 'time lost' through the negligence of the other - this was also a point of issue between the Bricklayers and the Brickmakers.

4.5. Theories of change

- 4.4.5 Theories of change were foundational to two of the repositories visited: the collections of the National Co-operative Archive were intended to demonstrate that mutual co-operation would achieve change; the Working Class Movement Library was founded on the principles of revolutionary socialism.
- 4.4.6 Unionist publications consistently state that progressive change happens through mutuality - that many opposed practices achieve (or are designed to achieve) divisions between workers and antagonism between workers, supervisors and management.
- 4.4.7 Much of the documentation resulted from opposition to particular situations - normally opposing change. Some evidence of awareness that reactivity was unlikely to achieve long-term goals.
- 4.4.8 An interesting finding of the research was the prominence given to the value of information in oppositional and activist movements. For example, it was clear that time management could not be rejected outright by workers, the key to opposition in individual settings was questioning its evidence base, attacking the 'scientificity' of its claims, by proposing that its time measurement was insufficiently accurate. However it was also emphasized that information alone is insufficient if not communicated and used to promote discussion of future developments.

5. *Conclusions*

- 5.1. It is evident that archival material can be a valuable resource for temporal research.
- 5.2. From the research undertaken, it appears that although not much archive material was devoted specifically to temporal issues, they were implicit within almost every document examined. Further analysis needs to be done to identify the most appropriate means of interrogating the data in ways beyond using it historically, in order to construct narratives about the past.
- 5.3. The visit to the Co-operative Archive, in which both Alex Buchanan and Michelle Bastian participated, suggested the value of collaborative archival research, in which the documents become the starting point for interdisciplinary discussion of the issues raised by them.
- 5.4. The most useful resources in terms of providing data appeared to be organizations and units with a specifically research mission, which often included research on relevant subjects, such as working hours, time management, flexi-time etc. Such research was often based on questionnaires, giving access, albeit mediated, to an on-the-ground assessment of the situation and a representation of the views of contemporary workers. This research data could be re-interrogated. Relevant organizations included the TUC's Research Department and the Institute for Workers' Control.
- 5.5. Situations of industrial conflict were often the most forthcoming about temporal issues - in particular conflicting temporalities - however these tend to be reactionary, focusing on preserving the status quo, and offer less insight into desired alternatives. It is suggested that research into alternative communities, not necessarily based on opposition to the prevalent economy, might offer additional insights into both alternative temporalities and alternative record-keeping practices (although there may be a problem in finding surviving records). There seems also to be a spiritual dimension to temporality which might be worth exploring via religious archives.
- 5.6. Guild records, although containing some fascinating documents yielding some relevant insights, were generally too fragmentary and too focused on Company administration to present an adequate picture of associated temporalities. It was, however, clear that some reconstructions of the Guild system appear to be romanticized. There has been some research into the temporality of the Arts and Crafts movement, with which Guild Socialism is associated, but this seems a potentially fruitful area for future research.
- 5.7. All of the repositories visited also hold printed and ephemeral material. Some of this was explored via the archival research and proved particularly useful; it is therefore recommended that any future research be expanded to include contemporary printed material.